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12 Months, 12 Top-Riders, 12 Interviews

by Mad40ne

SLEER Unser Team überzeugt durch

Interview with

Aaron Widlak

A COACH PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN THE GROWTH AND PERFORMANCE OF AN ATHLETE. EVEN IN UNICYCLING WE OFTEN FIND FANTASTIC COACHES WHO TRAIN GREAT ATHLETES. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT AARON WIDLAK IS LIKE.

THIS TIME WE HAVE DECIDED TO LOOK AT OUR SPORT FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, THE ONE OF THE TRAINER. AARON WIDLAK ALWAYS PROVIDES HIS GROUP WITH NEW STIMULUS AND MOTIVATIONS TO GROW, TO IMPROVE, AND TO GIVE ALWAYS THEIR BEST. AND THE RESULTS ARRIVE: 2016, 2018 AND 2019, HIS DJK ADLER 07 FREESTYLE GROUP WON THE TITLE OF GERMAN CHAMPION! IN THIS INTERVIEW AARON TELLS US HOW HE MANAGES TO KEEP THE MOTIVATION OF HIS FREESTYLERS ALWAYS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, WHERE HIS CREATIVITY COMES FROM, AND WHAT HE LOVES ABOUT OUR SPORT.



YOU HAVE BEEN TRAINING THE BIG GROUP OF THE DJK ADLER 07 ALREADY FOR 5 YEARS. HOW HAVE THESE RIDERS IMPROVED OVER TIME? WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THESE 5 YEARS?

When I took over the Group in 2015 I started with pretty concrete ideas about synchrony, use of space and how a Big Group should engage the audience and get them interested and involved during the entire routine. At first, it was something new for everyone, but over the years, we (riders and myself) have progressively tuned ourselves and aligned our ideas. This means that concepts such as synchrony or use of space were progressively assimilated by the riders and now they are implementing these concepts on their own, during their training sessions. Furthermore we can say that, on German-wide basis the level of tricks has relevantly risen in the recent years. During competitions riders always want to try and learn new tricks, and this has led in the past to the progressive abandonment of the standard ones. Here, too, we have found a good compromise over the years, so everyone can go on working on new tricks, without forgetting the standard ones. As a result, many of the tricks we insert in our Group routines have become more and more balanced and controlled, and we can also count now on a really rich variety of tricks.

IN 2019 YOUR TEAM WON FOR THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE TIME THE TITEL OF GERMAN CHAMPION. THE AUDIENCE AND THE JURY WERE CLEARLY VERY EXCITED ABOUT THE ROUTINE YOU HAVE EXECUTED, CALLED "FREAKSHOW". WHERE DOES THE CREATIVITY YOU PUT IN ALL ELEMENTS OF THE GROUP ROUTINE COME FROM?

First of all I have to say that I've never created the routines myself. Every year I can luckily rely on members of our Group who actively support me in this task. Thanks to this important interaction we can avoid for example, that I strongly push the group to develop a concept, that I particularly like, but none of the members of the Group can get into. Should this happen, the riders would not be able to keep the audience fully engaged, and for me this is number 1 priority in each routine. For this reason, a selection of themes is created first, from which the group chooses the one, which we then will work upon. The elements that will make up the group are defined by listening to the music. Most of the time you already have in mind the exact image of how the group could move on the stage in the various musical passages. At this point we only need to find suitable transitions and riding directions that must merge perfectly with the music.

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT "A GROUP IS ONLY AS STRONG AS ITS WEAKEST PLAYER", DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT OR ARE YOU MORE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT MOTIVATED AND STRONG ATHLETES MAY INSPIRE ALSO THE OTHER ONES AND THANKS TO THEIR PRESENCE THE ENTIRE GROUP BECOMES STRONGER?

I agree with both statements. It is clear that in creating a routine I can only insert those tricks that all members of our group can master. This means that the weakest element in the group determines the level of the tricks in the routine. However, this is how it works in our group. The best riders help the weakest and support them in acquiring new tricks. Thanks to this collaboration we succeed in reaching, in a quite short time period, a good level of execution of the required tricks, even by those riders who come from the under 15 category and who are not yet properly mastering this type of tricks.

ACCORDING TO YOUR OPINION, WHAT MAKES A TRAINER GOOD IN HIS/HER JOB? YOU THINK YOUR'RE MORE A RIGOROUS AND GOAL-ORIENTED COACH OR WITH A MORE RELAXED AND OPEN APPROACH, ALSO READY TO HAVE FUN TOGETHER?

I think that a good coach can find a middle ground and treat his team on an equal footing. If you always have a rigorous approach, there will come a time when you lose the team because the motivation is lacking. Nevertheless, though you would not want it, it may happen that, over the time, riders do not take you seriously. That's why I always try to behave as balanced as possible. Sometimes you manage it better than in other occasions, of course. All this is for me a continuous learning process. I never cease to identify in myself areas for improvement. However, I have learned a lot in these years and I'm aware of the fact, that in certain situations today I would react differently than I did in the past.



IF YOU ARE TRAINING A GROUP FOR SO LONG TIME, IT MAY HAPPEN THAT MOTIVATION DECREASES INSIDE THE GROUP. FOR MANY ATHLETES IT IS DIFFICULT TO REGAIN ENTHUSIASM AND DETERMINATION FOR TRAINING, ESPECIALLY AFTER A DEFEAT. IN YOUR CAREER AS A TRAINER, HAVE YOU EVER FACED SUCH SITUATIONS? IF YES, WHAT DO YOU DO TO GET THEIR MOTIVATION BACK IN ORDER TO APPROACH THE NEXT CHALLENGE IN THE RIGHT WAY?

In 2017 our group won the title of vice-champions in the German Championship with our routine called "Football". We had invested a lot of time and trained a lot and this placement has been felt by some as a defeat. However, this did serve as a stimulus to give the maximum out of ourselves the following year. Based on my experience, it is just after a victory that it is more difficult to bring the group back to the usual training program. In many of them the tension often reduces and there is the risk of taking the importance of training lightly. In these cases, it's enough to remind them, that we can proceed with our work maintaining the same level of performance, only if we go on working for success, even after a victory.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ATHLETES' FAMILIES IS CERTAINLY IMPORTANT FOR A COACH, IN PARTICULAR WHEN THE ATHLETES ARE STILL YOUNG. WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE TO THE PARENTS OF A YOUNG ATHLETE THAT IS AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS SPORTS CAREER?

Do not put pressure on children! During my experience as a coach I have often seen young athletes investing a huge amount of time in training, just because of the pressure from parents. In my opinion this isn't helping. 2-3 intensive training sessions per week are certainly more effective than 5-6 sessions during which the young rider sits at the edge of the gym to rest. There must be a healthy balance between time devoted to training and time for yourself. For young boys and girls this is the only way to stay focused on the goal without losing motivation.

DO YOU THINK THAT TALENT OR SPECIAL DOTS ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAKE AN ATHLETE, SINCE THE BEGINNING, A WORLD CHAMPION, OR SUCCESS IS JUST THE RESULT OF CONSTANT TRAINING, DETERMINATION AND PASSION?

It's not always clear-cut. There are certainly world champions, who have great talent and it is relatively fast and easy for them to acquire new tricks. Nevertheless, I think that a rider with less talent, who is however disciplined, goal-oriented and highly motivated can achieve the same results.



ON WHICH PRINCIPLES THERE IS NO COMPROMISE FOR YOU, NOW AND FOR SURE IN THE FUTURE?

In choosing the tricks for the group routine I pay attention to the fact that all the members of the group are able to perform them with mastery. That's why I actually tend to adopt fewer and simpler tricks in our routines, that however must be performed in a well synchronized way and must be suitable for the music chosen. On this there is no compromise for me, because this is what has made our routines so special in the last years.

BUT LET'S GIVE NOW A LOOK AT YOUR UNICYCLING CAREER

... IN THE PAST YOU HAVE BEEN ALSO A FREESTYLER OF SUCCESS. WHEN DID YOU START RIDING UNICYCLE? AND WHAT IS KEEPING INTACT YOUR PASSION STILL TODAY?

I was 5 when I first sat on a unicycle and in 1992, at the age of 6, I attended my first German championship. A year later, my sister, my father and my mother started riding unicycle and this became our "family sport". Later my parents became my coaches, in both, racing on track and freestyle, and they contributed significantly to the results I achieved nationally and internationally. Sport gave me so much in my youth, and even now I enjoy it a lot. As far as I'm concerned I then quit both, freestyle and race on track, and I turned to Hockey, but I still feel very close to freestyle and that's why I'm really happy to be still active and involved in this sport, thanks to my role as trainer of this fantastic group.

YOU ARE A SUCCESSFUL TRAINER. YOUR CAREER IS CERTAINLY MADE UP OF IMPORTANT AND EXCITING MOMENTS, THAT YOU REMEMBER WITH GREAT PLEASURE ... BUT WHICH EVENT OR VICTORY MAKES YOUR FLESH CREEP IF YOU LOOK BACK?

I have no doubt at all, it is the "Bergbau" routine, with which we got the title of German Champions in 2016. It was my first year as a Trainer. In the middle of the season new riders from Dorsten joined our Group. They came from a club that, in the meantime, was disbanded. First we spent time fine-tuning the entire group. No one would have bet on our victory, especially due to the fact that in previous years the other groups had shown a really high level of performance. And then such a home win! Still today when I think about it I feel proud of the way our Group performed this routine.



IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE IN FREESTYLE?

I find positive how freestyle is evolving over the years. The performance is somehow back in the foreground and thanks to this the routines are no longer so "crammed" with tricks. A few years ago we had the impression that the riders were putting all the possible and imaginable tricks under the motto "everything helps". The result was that the routine did not seem safe and it was not an attractive show, for the audience that did not know our sport. But now we are on track. I would be happy if qualifying criteria were introduced for the German championships. There are so many routines performed at every competition that the program of these events is crammed to the maximum and must be extended until the last minute.

WE ARE AT THE END OF OUR INTERVIEW. WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW YOUR NEXT GOALS. HAVE YOU IN MIND TO TRAIN YOUR GROUP FOR THE NEXT INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGE? WILL YOU JOIN UNICON 2020 WITH YOUR GROUP?

Yes, but the topic is still under discussion. In the next few weeks we will know if it is confirmed. But I'm optimistic about it.

THANKS AARON. IT HAS BEEN A REALLY PLEASANT AND INTERESTING MEETING. IT WOULD BE GREAT TO SEE YOU IN GRENOBLE AT THE WORLD-CHAMPIONSHIP 2020. IN THE MEANWHILE WE WISH YOU ALL GOOD WORK AND MANY MORE SUCCESSES!

THE INTERVIEW-SERIES „12 MONTHS, 12 TOP-RIDERS, 12-INTERVIEWS“ BY MAD4ONE ISN'T OVER YET :)

WITH THE SAME ENTHUSIASM AND FUN, WE WILL COME BACK TO YOU IN EARLY JANUARY WITH A NEW, NICE INTERVIEW. STAY TUNED! BUT NOW A HUGE THANKS TO ALL OUR READERS AND OUR BEST WISHES FOR THE HOLIDAYS AND FOR HEALTH AND HAPPINESS THROUGHOUT THE COMING YEAR.

FROM ALL OF US HERE, MERRY CHRISTMAS!